

April 6, 2001

Honorable Betty Lou Mitchell, Senate Chair  
Honorable Shirley K. Richard, House Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Education  
115 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: LD 1712

Dear Senator Mitchell and Representative Richard:

I am writing you to express, again, my strong support for LD 1712 and the Maine Learning Technology Endowment. I believe that passing legislation that will allow the recommendations of the MLTE report to become effective would be a sound investment in Maine's future.

I had the privilege of serving as a non-voting member of the Task Force on the Maine Learning Technology Endowment, and in that capacity was able to hear the wealth of evidence presented to its members. I was especially interested in how the Task Force might fashion a program that would, in a fiscally responsible way, build upon, and move beyond, the success of the Maine School and Libraries Network administered by the Maine PUC. I consider the final recommendations of the Task Force to be just such a program.

The program unanimously recommended by the Task Force, embodied in LD 1712, is a remarkably farsighted plan to bring to students throughout Maine -- beginning with those who, in the opinion of many experts, are the best candidates for intensive work with new technology -- the tools and training that will be vital to Maine's economic future as a part of the information economy. I believe that adopting the plan will show people both inside and outside of Maine that this state is serious about keeping abreast of the educational needs of its citizens as the world economy continues to evolve.

The modest demands on the MSLN funds proposed in the Task Force recommendations are fully in keeping with the purpose, and enabling legislation, of the MSLN. Under the MLTE report, funds would be drawn from the MSLN over the five years of the plan to support network infrastructure needs. These enhancements would not only support the new activities envisioned by the MLTE proposal, but would also

make the MSLN itself more robust and of greater value to students and library patrons throughout Maine. I am concerned that any attempt to substitute MSLN funds for the endowment funds envisioned by the Task Force would have the dual effects of weakening the MSLN while providing woefully inadequate support for the MLTE.

Speaking as a resident and parent, as much as one of the authors of the MSLN, I think that the MLTE proposal as submitted is precisely the kind of investment in the future competence and competitiveness of our citizens that Maine, and this committee and the legislature as a whole, should embrace. I urge you to seize this opportunity, and support LD 1712.

Very truly yours,

Thomas L. Welch